

Come and See: Encounters with Jesus in the Gospel of John

Part 10: Jesus, Pilate, and the Truth

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John 18:28-38

The Oxford Dictionary word of the year in 2016 was Post-truth: “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”

I. Truth Exists//Reality is Real

We humans relate to God the way Hamlet relates to Shakespeare. Hamlet couldn't know anything about the author – that is, unless the author chose to write information about himself into the play.

God does “reveal himself” through what he has made (Psalm 19; Rom 1).

“In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth.” – John 18:37

Jesus, as God the Son, he has *chosen* to “be born” – like he pre-existed, and then makes the decision. He has a “reason” to enter into the human story. This is Shakespeare not just writing clues *about* himself into his story – but if Shakespeare wrote *himself* into the story, as a character. Jesus, the Author – takes a place on the stage, a role in the story.

II. We Can Know *the* Truth//Even Though We Don't Know It All

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” – John 8:31-32

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” – John 14:6

Jesus, after he calls himself, “the way, the truth, and the life,” says that “if you have seen me you have seen the Father,” like, you've seen God.

What does he mean by all that?

“The Son [that is Jesus] is the radiance of God's glory and the *exact representation* of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” – Hebrews 1:3a

So when Jesus says, “I am the...truth,” it means he is the perfect embodiment and representation of God on earth, and therefore, he is the one who has all-knowledge. He knows the truth, and not just all “facts,” but what life means, what it's for, has the ability to define existence, to tell us who we are – to gift us with an identity.

"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." – John 1:12

III. Living *The Truth*//Not My Truth

"Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." – John 18:37b

"This is my command: love each other." – John 15:17

What is the fruit of listening to Jesus? Of obeying him? Of abiding in him? Of lining up with the truth? That we love each other. Truth is relational. It cannot be reduced to free-floating propositions or facts – the "truth" comes to us through a *Person*, and therefore it has a personal, relational component if we are to live in truthfulness.

At the end of the day, the way we love each other, the unity in the Spirit that we share – this is what gives legitimacy to the claims of the Christian faith. "By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another." – John 13:35

A. Love or Truth? A False Dichotomy

To love someone, in the sense that the Bible describes it, is to seek the good of the other person. But to do that, you have to define what is "good." And to say what is "good" is to believe something is true – true about the nature of reality. And so, to seek to love another is to make some kind of claim about that truth. You can't break these apart.

This means that I don't define "what is good," or "true," Jesus does. And so, if this is true, then to seek to love another is to adopt Jesus' own way of seeing the world, listening to him, and then working from there. I don't talk about "my truth", but *the truth*.

We can't escape the fact that all knowledge, about anything, is interpreted. It is processed between these two ears. And we have 'interests', biases, blind spots, and that should cause us to have some legitimate humility.

We do need to speak with humility: "Here's how I understand what Jesus is saying, and I'm seeking to live in line with that – but I may be missing some things; I want to be open to the possibility that I'm misreading this."

We can hold convictions, but we need to be aware that we are also fallen and finite, and we are prone to misunderstanding, we are prone to looking through our own biases.

We follow the one who is described in the Prologue as "full of grace and truth." – John 1:14

B. Speaking the Truth in Love

Seeking the good of the other means believing truthful things and communicating them with kindness. To be a follower of Jesus is to be a “truth and love combined” kind of person.

The person I most regularly need to speak to truth in love to is...myself:

God has graciously spoken to us. So, one of the reasons why I read the scriptures daily – even if it’s not a long section, or a long time – is just to realign my life with God, and with God’s truth about who he is, about who I am in him, about the world around me, and about the glorious hope he has called me to live in.

We help move each other to maturity:

“...speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ.” – Ephesians 4:15

1. Start with self-reflection:

“You hypocrite [which is a way of saying, ‘pay attention to your own inconsistency here – to the sort of person you are becoming when you act like this’], first, take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” – Matthew 7:5.

2. Pay Attention to My Method of Addressing “Truth and Love” Issues

If there is a conflicted situation that I need to address here are a few of my own rules:

- I pray and work through my own emotions if time allows – giving 24 hours if possible before addressing the challenge.
- Diamonds are forever and so are emails. Online communication forms are NOT a mechanism to deal with a conflict issues. Why?
 - It is way to easy to ‘dehumanize’ the other person when I’m just banging away at a keyboard.
 - There is no real human ‘dialogue’ when we send something in a message
 - Too little communication is actually happening. Only 7% of our communication is the actual words we say; 55% is body language, and 38% is our voice tone/inflection. That means 93% of our communication will be lost if we are not in person. And the people we are communicating with are far too valuable to leave out 93%. And so, in my view, to speak the truth *in love*, requires much better than that.
 - Jesus tells us to be very cautious about how we use our words. Jesus says that every word we say, we will give account for. “But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty work they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” – Matthew 12:36-37

Life Group Discussion and Reflection

Open Up

When you hear people claiming to have “the truth” about a topic, what is your general posture and why?

Dig In

Read the story of Jesus and Pilate in **John 18:28-40**.

1. Was there anything in the story, or particularly in Jesus’ interaction with Pilate that surprised or intrigued you? Share that with the group and discuss.
2. Jesus is revealing that he is a king, but that his kingdom “not of this world,” and then he gives the example of how he is not ordering violence of force from his followers. How might being a follower of Jesus, the one who claims to be the source of all truth, cause us to think differently about how we function in the world? (We might consider, especially, how we think about politics, economics, justice, violence)
3. In the message we looked at how “love and truth” belong to each other – that to love someone requires seeking their good, but that seeking their good requires that we have made decisions about what is true about reality, that is, we have a view of the “truth” in mind as well. Do you typically think of yourself as either a “love” or a “truth” person? How might this view, and the fact that Jesus was “full of grace and truth,” lead you to reconsider how you think of “love and truth” in your interactions?
4. Part of our calling as God’s people is “speaking the truth in love” with the aim of helping one another “grow in maturity” as we read in Ephesians 4:15.
 - a. Read Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 7:3-5. How are you incorporating this into your own practice of helping fellow believers grow? What aspect of this might you need to reconsider?
 - b. Note Matthew 7:6. This is a strange-to-us image of throwing pearls to swine suggests that there are times when we do not share the truth with people – they are not in a place to hear it, and to begin a conversation that aims to address untruth would do great damage to yourself (the Proverbs speak about this often). What role must discernment play in our approach to “speaking the truth in love”?
 - c. In the message I shared some of my “rules” for difficult or potentially conflicted conversations (They are listed above in the handout and include a number of “reasons” why I practice these. Discuss how you might want to incorporate some of these into your own way of handling difficult conversations.

Pray

Take some time to thank Jesus that there is such a thing as “true”, and that we can, through Jesus’ own life and teaching, have access to it. Ask God for the confidence to live as those who, like Jesus, are “full of grace and truth” in our world. Pray for the needs of those in your group, with great confidence that God hears us and loves us.